

Medical Officer's Annual Report, 1896.

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—In presenting to you my annual report on the health and sanitary condition of the town I am pleased to be able to report a much lower death-rate than for the last few years, and also a marked decrease in the number of infectious cases. From the tabular forms accompanying this report it will be seen that the deaths of eighty-seven persons were registered. This, after deducting seven deaths in the Cottage Hospital and Workhouse of persons not belonging to the town, would give a death-rate of 14·3 per 1,000, estimated on the population as returned at the last census, which no doubt is nearer the correct number than the estimated one. One death was recorded from diphtheria and five from measles. The births numbered 124, equivalent to a birth-rate of 22·3 per 1,000. The following figures epitomise the ages at which death occurred throughout the district: Under one year of age, 12; over one year and under five years, 4; over five and under fifteen, 5; over fifteen and under twenty-five, 2; over twenty-five and under sixty-five, 26; over sixty-five years, 38. I will now refer to the presence of the different zymotic diseases throughout the year. Two cases each of small-pox, scarlet fever, and enteric fever were reported to me, and prior to November there were only two cases of diphtheria, but early in that month three cases of this disease were notified, and in December two more cases occurred. These cases were not confined to any particular part of the town, nor did they bear any connection with each other, so that it was difficult to trace any definite source of infection. With one exception they were removed to the Isolation Hospital, but this did not entirely stamp out the disease, as cases have appeared intermittently until lately, although at present there is no case under treatment. Two cases of small-pox arose from a tramp, who complained of feeling ill and was admitted to the Workhouse before the exact nature of his complaint was apparent, and the disease was transmitted in a very mild form to one of the inmates. I am at a loss to conjecture what would have been done with the man if he had not been inadvertently admitted to the Workhouse, as there is no provision made by the Council for the reception of such cases, and the Local Government Board prohibits the treatment of small-pox in workhouses. The question of accommodation for such cases was under the consideration of the Council, and a cottage in a most suitable and isolated locality could have been secured, but satisfactory terms could not be arranged, and so the matter fell through. This was a matter of regret, as the cottage was most suitable, though very much out of repair, and convenient, as there was a small cottage adjoining, where an elderly couple could have resided as caretakers at a very slight cost. The two cases of enteric fever occurred in the same houses, and were probably caused by the emanations from a drain, situated near the bedroom window. The two cases of scarlet fever were both removed to the Isolation Hospital. Measles were very prevalent in the town during December, and five deaths occurred. I noticed that during the time the schools were closed for the Christmas holidays there

was a great decrease in the number of cases, and recommended a further closing of the schools for another week, which was accordingly done, with a result that the disease was almost entirely stamped out. There are two matters that require the serious consideration of the Council; one is the condition of Swan River, and the other the nuisance and danger arising from the road gratings, situated at the sides of the road for the reception of surface water, many of which are connected directly with the sewer, and in some parts of the town are the only means of ventilating the sewer. I am perfectly aware of the necessity of sewer ventilation, but think that the escape of sewer gas on the borders of the pavements and in close proximity to the doors and windows of residents is a nuisance and a source of danger to those exposed to it. All these gratings should be properly trapped, and other means, either by shafts or openings in the centre of the roads, formed for the proper ventilation of the sewers where necessary. The other matter of importance, viz., the nuisance arising from Swan River, was very marked during the months of August and September, and although for some years the nuisance has been complained of during the summer months, it has never before reached such an unbearable state as during the last summer. Although the Surveyor reports that there is little or no discharge of sewage into the river, still the appearance of its banks, and the state of the water, points to actual sewage pollution. The river being arched over for some considerable portion of its course makes the inspection of it very difficult, but I think it must be in this covered part of the river that the mischief exists. Various remedies have been tried to mitigate the nuisance, but at present without any improvement. I hope that further means will be taken before the hot weather sets in to improve the present state of the river. I believe a committee was appointed to inquire into the matter, but I have not heard that any conclusion was arrived at. As I have mentioned in my two previous reports, the extension and treatment of the sewage of the town is still under consideration. Such being the case, I shall refrain from commenting on the matter, but hope that a scheme satisfactory to all parties may shortly be agreed on. The water supply to the town has been ample and of good quality. The connection of Holywell spring to the present supply will prevent any fear of a scarcity of water in the future. All cases of infectious disease have been personally visited by myself, and systematic inspections have been made of all parts of the town, and house to house visitations of those parts most requiring it, and any insanitary conditions were reported to the Council at their monthly meetings. The bakehouses and slaughter-houses have been regularly inspected, and all the dairies in the town being now registered are under proper supervision. I beg to submit with this report the tables furnished by the Local Government Board, one of which deals with the mortality in the district and the other with the prevalence of infectious diseases.—I am, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, yours faithfully, FRED I. FLOWER.

